361 streams. The villages and their populations were studied from Bilwas Karma to San Carlos. (See map.) The villages themselves are perched up high on the banks so that floods will not carry them away.

342 Once a house site has been determined the Indians clear the bush and all large trees, that may endanger the house in case of storms, are felled. The house is usually of rectangular design. Four posts or more are used to hold up a sharp sloping thatched palm leaf roof *(bahna)*. In many houses these roofs extend to about five feet off the ground. The posts are usually of ironwood. Several varieties are used for thatching. [324] such as the *cohune (Attalea cohune)*, *skomphora*, *cola de gallo* or *suita (Calyptrogyne sarapiquensis)* and *caña danta (Geonoma* sp.). These palm leaves may last from for to five years as a roof. Although many Indians use nails today, lianas are still used to bind these structures together. The sides of the houses may be made of split bamboo or boards. Most houses have a sort of loft *(tint)* immediately beneath the roof. It is formed by laying split bamboo or boards across the beams and is reached with the use of a ladder. Various forms of bamboo wattlework may make up the interior walls. Most of the dwellings seen have the floor elevated from the ground at a distance of three to four feet. Thus the houses appear to be set on a series of stilts.

Formerly long communal houses or multiple family houses were used by tribes. Today this practice is abandoned and the family type house is what is found. It must be noted, however, that although many houses are raised from the ground, one occasionally encounters a more primitive dwelling where the family live directly on the ground clay with just a low overhanging roof for protection. But this process can only serve as a temporary shelter since the torrential rains would quickly wash away the household effects.

352 Iron stoves for cooking are common in most houses and in some cases [343] the stove is in a separate house (cookhouse). Many old crates, wooden 354 boxes, and bamboo devices are used for tables and chairs. Beds are made of split bamboo and are raised on posts two to three feet from the floor. Recently hammocks have become popular in the area. They may be purchased from the traders or hand made with cotton, tree bark or Bromelia fibers. Small hammocks are used for children.

● [373] Pine wood torches are used for illumination at night and in some cases fiber clusters are impregnated with oils or waxes and lit up. Under the roof the fishing, hunting and agricultural implements are kept.

3: Pijoan D-5 (ca. 1945) 1946
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MEAT FOODS

226 A very large share of food is obtained from the sea, the lagoons, and the rivers. Larger fish are caught by throwing a spear or javelin, smaller ones with hooks or nets. Previous to the introduction of steel, the Indians fashioned their spear heads from bamboo, which was easily cut into barbs. A cord is attached to the point whereas the shaft is a solid light wood. With this device they spear the carp-like snook and the tarpon. At night fish are attracted by the use of a pitch pine torch and are also speared; turtles are harpooned. Fish are sometimes caught by "poisoning" the water. For this purpose the Indians utilize several vines; usually one which has been identified as *Seriania inebrians*. The vine is crushed with flat stones to release the poisonous milky juice. A creek is temporarily dammed and at some distance above the dam the crushed plant is thrown into de water, the fish are quickly paralyzed and are then caught by the Indians. Large fish are easily harpooned when in this condition. Smaller fish are allowed to float away and recover when they reach unpolluted water. Bows and arrows are rarely used today for fishing purposes but near mining centers fish are often dynamited; this process is to be condemned since it destroys the majority of the smaller fish.

[225] The tails of young alligators and crocodiles are occasionally eaten. Lobsters, crabs, and mollusks form an important item of food. In general, the rivers and lagoons afford an ever present, easily obtainable source of food.

224 With muzzle loading and other equally out-of-date shotguns, the Indians hunt game. Spears, bows, and arrows are occasionally used but the blowgun is no longer used. Game is found in abundance along the margins of the rivers. Deer, Peccary, spider monkey and capuchin monkey, tapir, lizards and a variety of birds, including parrots, red-spoonbills, curasows, mountain hens, quail, partridge, pigeons and a number of wild ducks, are used for food. In addition to the wild game, the Indians raise and eat some domestic cattle, pigs and chikens. There is no lack of meat of one form of another. It is often preserved by drying and smoking it for several days over a dull fire, since the humidity is too high for sun drying. Salt is used sparingly by the Indians.

FOOD PREPARATION AND CONSUMPTION

● 373 Fire is a necessity for cooking, for without it the Indians would have to subsist on raw foods. Fire is produced by twirling a hardwood stick in a notch of wild cane. When smoke appears a piece of wild

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cotton fluff is placed in the notch and the twirling continued. Several 373
fragments of the cotton begin to glow and these are fanned into flame. Today, many Indians use matches but the primitive method of making fire is still used to a great extent. Many of these fires may have been started a generation or more ago. They are tended or kept burning in iron or stone cooking ovens within the houses.

Many of the Miskito use bamboo tongs or tweezers to pull roasted 415
plantains, cassava, and other foods out of the hot ashes. The Miskitos use large wooden mortars *(uno, no)* and hard wooden pestles *(una, mihta)* to pound grains and fruits. The pestle is single headed and tapers toward the handle end. The Sumu Indians on the other hand use a metate and mealing stone for grinding maize and cacao. Light iron tripod post (*dikwa*) are found in every household, and have replaced earthen vessels for cooking purposes. Large calabashes with a small hole in the apex, just large enough to insert a finger, are the common water canteens *(kahmuntara)*. Segments of a large species of bamboo are also used to haul water in certain areas. They are made from a section of the bamboo stem cut so that a nodal septum serves as a bottom. The stem may be cut off immediately below the next septum or it may be cut outside of each septum to convert it into a small barrel. A hole is then drilled for filling and a plug inserted.

Fermented beverages are stored in large earthen vessels *(sumi)*. Plates, cups and glasses are made from the calabash *(kalmi)* fruit, which is cut and the soft watery pulp and seeds removed. Square, round, or oval shaped bowls are sometimes made of mahogany and other woods, but calabash bowls seem to be preferred. A variety of wooden spoons, pat sticks, and stirring sticks are also used. A primitive sugar mill *(tranko)* is employed to squeeze the juice from sugar cane.

It has been observed that the Miskito Indian has an enormous ap- 264
petite. At some meals he may take as many as a dozen helpings. On the other hand he may go days with hardly any food at all, specially during inclement weather, or during a hunt or a long travel. Generally, the women do the cooking, the men only on trips away from home. No regularity is observed in eating, most of the Indians eating whenever they are hungry or after hunting. They usually have one meal in the early morning and one at night before retiring. There is no midday meal. When a meal is ready the grownup men are served first with the best and largest shares. A calabash of soup or stew is usually served first. Salt if available is eaten separately. The women and children eat together. Indians rarely speak during a meal, and a visitor is never questioned while he too should remain in silence, since to do otherwise would be a breach of etiquette.